

City of Morgantown
Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes August 21, 2014

Present: Jan Derry, Chair
Michael Fike
Anne Marie Lofaso
Anne Marlene Robinson-Savino, Vice Chair
Don Spencer, Secretary
Fran Whiteman
Bob Jones, Research Consultant

Meeting called to order by Jan Derry, Chair, at 6:40 p.m. The commissioners approved the agenda without additions or corrections.

Public Session: Morgantown citizen John Miles spoke in the public session to clarify his statements reported in the minutes of the March 2014 HRC meeting. He stated that employers take a risk in hiring minority candidates because if it does not work out, the minority employees can challenge the employers' decision through human rights agencies and organizations. Under the present situation more whites will be hired because there is less likelihood that they will make protests of discrimination. He also contested minimum wage requirements saying that people should have the right to work for less if they want to. The market will adapt so that those who are worth more will be paid more.

Communications: Jan Derry asked that the Commission discuss the communication received regarding a performer at the motorcycle fest event. It was agreed that the issue involved a repeat performance by a performer at a location outside of the City's jurisdiction. It was observed that the issue would not be with the performer but with the contracting organization which made the decision to hire the performer for the occasion. Should such an event arise within the City, the HRC could contest the decision as a conflict in values with the intent of Morgantown to build a more inclusive city.

Other communications reported by the chairperson was a call from a person who wanted to appeal discrimination in an employment situation. The person was referred to attorneys at the State Human Rights Commission. The importance of linkage with the State HRC was evident. A need for a 24/7 telephone information line was discussed. Such a line is maintained in operation by the Charleston Human Rights Department.

Minutes: The minutes of the July 17 HRC meeting were approved by acclamation.

Progress Reports: In the absence of David Bott, the Commission decided to proceed with making contact with a possible 20 hour per week legal intern from the Law School. The problem of identifying an attorney to supervise the intern brought about identification of three possibilities: David Fryson of the WVU Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (WVU DEI) (to be contacted by Don Spencer), Chris Plein of the Public Administration Department and Bob Bastress at the Law School (to be contacted by Anne Marie Lofaso). Contact will also be made with Eric Meadows of the Laws School Work Study Program for funding in case the individual would be legible. Jenifer Powell is the person in charge of the legal internship program at the Law School.

Don Spencer indicated that there was no new progress on the Human Rights Film Festival since the July HRC meeting. The WVU DEI is working to set up a third planning meeting which will involve some new participants. A standing advisory committee has yet to be named.

Brian Jara, who had notified the Commission that he would be unable to attend this meeting, reported that he will be discussing the HRC draft resolution on civil right's history with representatives of the WVU Faculty Senate.

Human Rights Campaign MEI Survey: Fran Whiteman and Don Spencer provided a draft eight page response for the City of Morgantown to submit to the Campaign regarding questions pertaining to a Municipal Equality Index being distributed to cities throughout the United States. Mayor Selin had asked the HRC to complete the survey for the City. Whiteman and Spencer were appointed to be the Committee to complete the document for submission by August 30, 2014. The completed draft document had been distributed to the Commissioners on short notice before the meeting and was available in the meeting packet.

After discussion of several items in the document, on a motion by Robinson-Savino, seconded by Fike, the Commissioners approved the document for submission to the Mayor and City Manager for final review before its mailing with 4 attachments to the Campaign to meet its deadline. On a follow-up motion by Fike, seconded by Whiteman, the Commission voted to recommend that the document be forwarded to members of the Morgantown City Council after submission to the Campaign. Both votes passed without dissenting votes.

Human Rights Survey Report: Bob Jones reported on the wrap-up of the Needs Survey which yielded 657 responses. He identified a few problems which had to be addressed in tabulating and analyzing the data. He expressed appreciation for the work of Lynn Castro in entering the data from hard copies of the survey. Bob also provided information on the draft report for the survey prepared for the Commission by Donna Spencer, a medical school researcher in Minneapolis and native of Morgantown. Commission members reviewed the report, noted strong indications of economic and housing problems, and made suggestions that the poverty rate be included in the document as well as information contained in a recent Dominion Post newspaper article about some residents being "priced out" of their homes in Morgantown.

Matters of gender identity, sexual orientation, blindness and disabilities were also noted as "poor" in welcoming and supporting people by a fifth or more of the respondents. Appreciation was expressed for the volunteer work done in the enabling important progress on the report. It was recommended that additional time not be invested in further breaking down the data at the present time. It was further recommended that the Bob's committee now work to generate several slides on the data which could be used in making a visual report on the survey to the City Council and other interested organizations.

New Business: In response to the telephone request for assistance on employment discrimination, it was recommended that the Commission take steps to have a 24/7 information phone line established providing linkage with the State Human Rights Commission and as a means for public contact with the HRC. As previously noted, the City of Charleston has established such a line. A proposed message for such a line was reviewed. Jan Derry agreed to make the request on behalf of the Commission to the City Manager.

In other new business questions were raised about the status of the Commission's need to prepare a final fiscal report for CDBG funds. Don Spencer agreed to check on the matter with Dave Bott.

Jan Derry appointed a committee of Marlene Robinson-Savino, Bob Jones and Don Spencer to explore ways that the Commission might address the need for promoting diversity in the representation of the citizens in City government. This committee will have an opportunity to work on this Affirmative Action related issue with Rob Lyons of the WVU DEI.

Regular Meeting Items: Parking passes from the City Clerk were distributed to members of the Commission.

The date for the next meeting of the Commission was set for September 18, 2014.

The meeting was adjourned by consensus approval of the membership at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted.
Don Spencer
Secretary